



FEMA

# Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

## National Level Exercise 2011 (NLE 11)

### 1. What is the National Level Exercise 2011 (NLE 11)?

NLE 11 is a National Exercise Program (NEP) Tier I exercise. The NEP provides U.S. Government departments and agencies the opportunity to exercise existing capabilities to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from major disasters, man-made or natural, and other emergencies in an integrated fashion. Participation ranges from the Federal to the State, local, tribal, and private sector levels.

NLE 11 will address efforts to respond to and recover from a catastrophic earthquake in the New Madrid Seismic Zone (NMSZ) of the Central United States. The NLE 11 functional exercise will take place May 16–20, 2011.

### 2. What is NLE 11's purpose, and what capabilities will it validate?

The purpose of NLE 11 is to prepare and coordinate a multiple-jurisdictional integrated response to a national catastrophic event. Led by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), mandated by Congress, and directed by the White House, NLE 11 will involve thousands of government officials at the Federal, State, and local levels; members of the private sector; and the general public. All participating officials will conduct simultaneous, related exercise activities across all participating States.

The exercise is designed to validate the following capabilities:

- Communications
- Critical resource logistics and distribution
- Mass care (sheltering, feeding, and related services)
- Medical surge
- Citizen evacuation and shelter-in-place
- Emergency public information and warning
- Emergency Operations Center (EOC) management
- Recovery

### 3. Why is the exercise series no longer called TOPOFF?

With the establishment of the NEP and the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (PKEMRA), requirements were set forth to conduct all-hazards exercises annually. Accordingly, the congressionally mandated TOPOFF series, which focused on terrorist

attacks, has evolved into the NLE series, which takes an all-hazards approach, focusing on preparation for catastrophic crises ranging from terrorism to natural disasters.

**4. Where will NLE 11 activities take place?**

NLE 11 functional exercise activities will take place at command posts, EOCs, and other locations to include Federal facilities in the Washington, D.C., area and Federal, regional, State, tribal, local, and private sector facilities in the eight affected central U.S. States. The eight States encompass four different FEMA regions: Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee (FEMA Region IV); Illinois and Indiana (FEMA Region V); Arkansas (FEMA Region VI); and Missouri (FEMA Region VII).

**5. What is the difference between a functional exercise and a full-scale exercise?**

A functional exercise focuses on coordination of decision making and communications during a simulated disaster. It is a functional assessment of planning and decision making in a time of crisis that engages multiple agencies in policy decisions and communications over several days. A full-scale exercise adds on-the-ground first response activities to test participants on a wide range of capabilities and task areas, including incident response, incident command, cross-jurisdictional coordination, risk communication, and implementation of protocols and policies.

**6. What is the scenario for NLE 11?**

NLE 11 will simulate the catastrophic nature of a major earthquake in the central United States region of the New Madrid Seismic Zone (NMSZ), and involves the simulation of a magnitude 7.7 earthquake along the southern segment of the New Madrid Fault, closely followed by a magnitude 6.0 earthquake caused by a triggered event in the Wabash Valley Seismic Zone (WVSZ).

**7. How is the NLE 11 scenario developed?**

A national team of exercise planners experienced in catastrophic response planning, seismology, and disaster recovery develop the scenario. The national team also works with exercise design teams from all the participating jurisdictions, including four regional design teams and eight State design teams. The exercise planners work with private sector entities and Federal departments and agencies to ensure that the scenario can sufficiently sustain the exercise and meet participants' specific training objectives.

Within the national and regional design teams, working groups have been established to focus on specific functions: control and evaluation; scenario; private sector; international; external affairs; long-term recovery; citizen and community preparedness; and training.

**8. Where can I learn more about earthquakes in the NMSZ?**

The U.S. Geological Survey's recently released publication, *Putting Down Roots in Earthquake Country – Your Handbook for Earthquakes in the Central United States*, provides information about the threat of earthquakes in the Central U.S., particularly along the New Madrid seismic zone, and explains how to prepare for, survive, and recover from such events. This publication can be accessed at <http://pubs.usgs.gov/gip/119/>.

**9. How does NLE 11 relate to the NMSZ Catastrophic Planning Initiative?**

NLE 11 will be the largest exercise to date of plans developed through the NMSZ Catastrophic Planning Project. Over the past several years, this effort has brought together the eight NMSZ States, as well as hundreds of government agencies; business, industry, and voluntary organizations; and scientific and academic institutions to collaboratively develop integrated earthquake response and recovery plans for the NMSZ. NLE 11 will validate these plans, particularly the joint NMSZ State/FEMA regional response plans and the Federal Interagency Response Plan – Earthquake (FIRP-E).

**10. What is the overall goal of the NMSZ Catastrophic Planning Initiative?**

The overall goal of the Catastrophic Planning Project has been to establish a unified response approach that integrates emergency management, private sector, and critical infrastructure communities into a single, coordinated response with Federal, State, local, tribal, and other government entities.

**11. What is the “Whole Community” approach, and how is it being applied to NLE 11?**

The Whole Community approach states that preparing for, mitigating, responding to, and recovering from a disaster requires an approach in which the entire community is empowered to work together as partners. By engaging volunteer and non-profit partners, the private sector, and—most importantly—the public, FEMA is helping keep the focus on the communities it serves and equipping them to work together as neighbors to help those in need. The outcome of this new approach is that affected communities will receive the supplies and help they need more quickly.

The Whole Community approach is being applied to NLE 11 through specific outreach mechanisms led by the Citizen and Community Preparedness Working Group (CCPWG), Private Sector Working Group (PSWG), and External Affairs Working Group (EAWG). To determine success, specific Whole Community metrics are being identified and assigned against the exercise’s objectives.

**12. What does it mean to “play” in the exercise? How is exercise play prompted and regulated?**

“Play” is the term used to describe how personnel from a variety of agencies and organizations act out the response to the scenario as though it had actually occurred. Players are fed information by exercise controllers, based on a Master Scenario Events List (MSEL). The MSEL contains a number of key events that trigger the need to make decisions and conduct activities to exercise specific agency capabilities and achieve the exercise objectives.

**13. How does NLE 11 differ from previous exercises in the NLE and TOPOFF series?**

With each successive exercise in the NLE program, coordination and cooperation are enhanced, resulting in continuous improvements to the preparedness effort. NLE 11 will be the first natural-hazard NLE, held in the bicentennial anniversary year of the 1811 New Madrid earthquakes.

NLE 11 provides an opportunity to develop a regional response capability that leverages the emergency experience of each State and region. The exercise will also, for the first time,

include the full involvement of citizen and community groups and private sector entities in preparedness and response planning. Follow-on seminars on long-term recovery and assessment reports will be held after the exercise.

Also, multiple Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) States (States that are unaffected by the hazard but have pre-existing agreements to assist neighboring States in need) will have the opportunity to participate.

**14. How will NLE 11 enhance America's preparedness?**

Preparedness is not only based on lessons learned but also on challenging our systems with difficult situations. NLE 11 will strengthen our national preparedness by validating our response and recovery capabilities at all levels of government. In addition, experience gained during NLE 11 and future national exercises will provide valuable insights that guide future planning for securing the Nation against man-made and natural disasters.

NLE 11 emphasizes an integrated approach to national preparedness, ensuring that existing preparedness initiatives are closely aligned and operationally synchronized across governmental, public, and private sectors. NLE 11 also offers an important opportunity to aggressively exercise capabilities developed or strengthened as a result of recent events, including new technologies, policies, and procedures.

**15. How will core capabilities be evaluated during and after NLE 11?**

Through a comprehensive evaluation process, the exercise will assess response and recovery capabilities both nationally and regionally.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) is a capabilities- and performance-based program that provides a standardized mechanism for building on such lessons learned. HSEEP outlines an evaluation methodology by using Exercise Evaluation Guides (EEGs). These standardized guides enable the emergency preparedness community to assess current capabilities and measure preparedness over time for any jurisdiction in every area.

In addition to establishing standard evaluation tools, this model gives guidance on gathering and reporting lessons learned, which help to identify strengths and areas needing improvement. This information is then folded back into the exercise process to enhance its relevance and realism for the next exercise in the series.

**16. Will lessons learned from NLE 11 be shared, and if so, by what method?**

The FEMA/National Exercise Division (NED) utilizes Quick Look Reports as a mechanism for quickly sharing elements of the After Action Report (AAR) with exercise participants. In addition, the Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS) Web site is used to distribute a select set of exercise lessons learned and best practices to a wider audience.

**17. Why not make all reports about the exercise public information?**

While consideration may be given to releasing detailed AARs to the general public, these reports often contain detailed, sensitive information on the Nation's response capabilities.

Such information in the hands of an enemy of the United States could jeopardize homeland security. Therefore, it has been determined not to be in the national security interest of the United States to release the full AARs for NLE 11 or any other national exercises containing “For Official Use Only” information that may reveal national vulnerabilities or law enforcement sensitive information.

**18. Is the exercise open to outside observation?**

Because of the sensitive nature of the capabilities being exercised, external observation and information dissemination will be carefully managed. Certain international, Federal, State, tribal, and local officials are invited to observe a portion of the exercise, so that they may better understand how the Nation is preparing to address a catastrophic event. Members of the media will be able to attend briefings during and after the exercise. For more information about the observer program, contact [NLE11-ObserverProgram@dhs.gov](mailto:NLE11-ObserverProgram@dhs.gov).

**19. What happens if there is a real terrorist attack or natural disaster while the exercise is taking place?**

The exercise will be halted immediately. No essential personnel will be diverted from any type of actual emergency response effort to respond to simulated events, nor will ongoing preparedness efforts be compromised.

**20. How can I stay informed about NLE 11?**

For the latest NLE 11 news and developments, please visit [www.ready.gov/nle2011](http://www.ready.gov/nle2011).

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